

["Slick" Reynolds]

Beliefs and Customs - Folkstuff

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Frank Byrd

ADDRESS 224 W. 135th. St. NYC

DATE September 22, 1938

SUBJECT HARLEM HOUSE-RENT PARTIES

1. Date and time of interview
2. Place of interview The [Symphony?] Club — a meeting place of musicians, actors, dancers and other vaudeville performers — 131st. St. and 7th. Ave
3. Name and address of informant Related to the reporter by "Slick" Reynolds, Black Jack dealer at the Symphony Club, located at 131st. St. and Seventh Ave. (Harlem)
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

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6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

Reynolds freely admits, like many others, of having made a regular business of giving rent parties and maintaining a “buffet-flat” (pleasure house)

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FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

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Sure, I used to give rent-parties all the time. And I made pretty good at it till repeal came along. Then I hade had to give it up. Too much risk. A cop on the beat could be paid off, but them A.B.C. boys (State Beverage Control Board) can't be reached even by the big shots.

There was plenty of dough in the party racket and it used to be the mainstay of a lot of the boys who needed to make a little extra dough. But the only trouble with staging rent-parties as an out-an-out hustle was the lousy crowd you had to cater to. You put out your cards, hire a piano-player, open your door an' just wait for all sorts of studs and chicks to wander in. If you were lucky, you might get through the night without any major accidents — but I never seemed to have that kinda luck. Some punchdrunk [spade or dizzy?] broad

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was always breaking up my shindigs. First they'd get loaded to the gills with King Kong, start getting rambunctuous an' wanting to pick a fight at the drop of a hat. Some guy'd get accidentally shoved or just naturally get evil cause his ol' lady would dance more than once...same guy. The next minute, he'd be whooping like a wild Indian, waving his blade and threatening to cut anybody who came near him. Well, that'd most likely be the end of my party. Folks would start running in every direction — out 2 into the hallway, on the fire-escape, anywhere. One Saturday night I even found a chick bracing herself inside the dumb-waiter shaft, after some Mose went haywire and shot out the lights.

It all started when his girl got stuck on a big black boy dressed in longshoreman's dungarees, who came stalking in about twelve o'clock with a pocket full of money and a mind to spend it all. He gunned this chick, liked her style and set about making a play for her. The broad was willing and showed her teeth from then on. Her feller kept watching out of the corner of his eye, and by the time he'd been back to the kitchen five or six times for a slug [?] of my liquid, I knew that it wouldn't be long before he'd explode. Well, I was right. Pretty soon he walks up to the big boy an' says:

["Listen, ol' son — can't you find anybody else to dance wit' 'ceptin' my ol' lady?"

Ain't no sign on her says she's yo' ol' lady, is dere?"

"Well, sign or no sign, better not catch you dancing wid her no more."

"'Spose I do. What den?"?]

"Well, I'll either have some of you or you'll have some of me!"

"Well, don't give a damn if I do," says the big feller; an' from then on, it was on. Glasses started flying, chairs overturned, women screaming, and God knows what else. I usually ducks into a closet an' waits for 'em to finish it up before I comes out to look things over an' see how much damage is done.

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Well, that's how most of my parties ended. An' then, to top it off, when the cops would come, they'd stalk through the house straight back to the kitchen and throw down a half dozen or more slugs of my likker and stuff their cost pockets with fried chicken.

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I was lucky to make a profit at all. But what the hell, sometimes I had a good night and my books showed a pretty fair profit. Guess that's why I stayed in the racket until it finally petered out.